

# Electing the President

By LAURINDA KEYS LONG

**A**lthough U.S. Senator Barack Obama won a majority of the votes cast on November 4 and a majority of electoral votes, which are determined by how many people live in each state, and although he is now being called president-elect, he has actually not yet been elected president.

Under the provisions of the U.S. Constitution, presidents are not elected directly by the people, but by a group of designated citizens known as electors. This group makes up the Electoral College. These electors will gather in the state capitals and in Washington, D.C. on December 15 to cast their votes for president and vice president. Their votes will then be counted by the U.S. Congress in early January, and the winners will be announced in time to be sworn in on January 20.

But why, then, all the celebration over the election of Obama? It's because according to the vote tallies, popular and electoral, Obama has the support of the majority of the American people. Only one percent of the electors, in the 219 years of U.S. presidential elections, have ever failed to vote for the person to

whom they were pledged.

All states directly elect their electors. That's who Americans were actually voting for on November 4—slates of electors, representing Obama, or Republican Senator John McCain, or candidates from other parties. In some states, the electors' names are listed on the ballot under the candidate. In others, not.

So how do the electors get designated? By their parties.

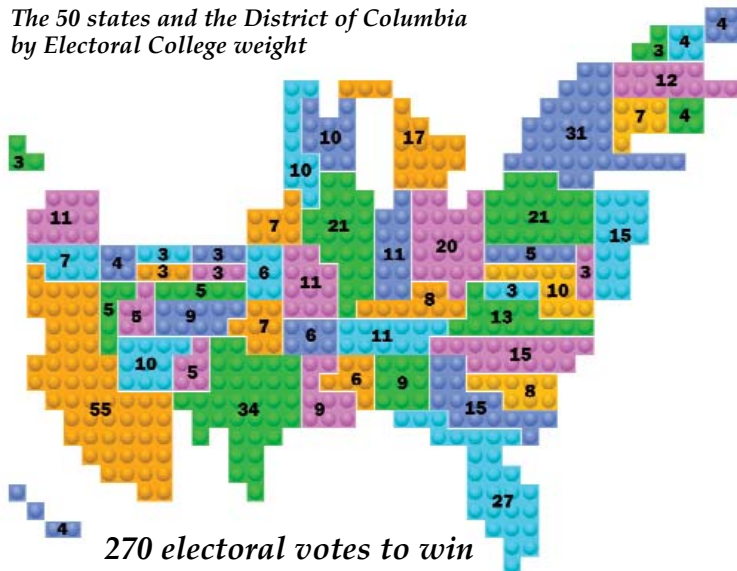
Most states have winner-take-all presidential voting. If Obama got more direct votes in a state, say California, then he won all of that state's electoral votes. For California, that adds up to 55, one for each U.S. Senator and for each member of the House of Representatives from California.

Why is it this way?

One reason is that the Constitution was written in the 18th century. Time was needed for people to travel long distances. That's why the electors have more than a month to reach their state capitals, and why several more weeks are given for the members of Congress to gather to count the electoral votes, on January 6.

Another reason for the system is that the Electoral College system preserves the role of states in

*The 50 states and the District of Columbia by Electoral College weight*



choosing the president. The founding fathers did not want the president to be chosen by only those in large, populous states, or big cities. Thus, they made it necessary for candidates to win support in many different states. For example, Obama won the most votes in five of the six most populous states. But it wasn't enough to win the election. He and McCain had to campaign across the country.

In this election, there are 538 elec-

tors. When there is a tie in electoral votes, the House of Representatives selects the president and the Senate chooses the vice president. This is why electors cannot be members of the U.S. Congress, and why ordinary people, committed to their party and candidate, are chosen for the high honor of electing the president of the United States.

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